

**Minutes of the Special Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Monday January 29, 2018
12:40 p.m. – 2:20 p.m.
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

Paul Sagan, Chair, Cambridge
James Morton, Vice-Chair, Boston
Katherine Craven, Brookline
Ed Doherty, Boston
Amanda Fernandez, Belmont
Margaret McKenna, Boston
Michael Moriarty, Holyoke
James Peyser, Secretary of Education
Mary Ann Stewart, Lexington
Hannah Trimarchi, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Marblehead
Martin West, Newton

(Jeff Wulfson, Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Secretary to the Board, was not present at the Special Meeting)

Chair Sagan called to order the Special Meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) at 12:40 p.m. and the members introduced themselves.

Chair Sagan said the sole topic on the Board’s agenda today is selection of a candidate for commissioner to recommend to the Secretary. He introduced Rosa Morris, Korn Ferry search consultant, who joined the meeting via video. Chair Sagan recounted the commissioner search process, which began half a year ago. He thanked the Board, community groups, stakeholders, and the public for their input, including the comments submitted after the finalist interviews on January 26. Chair Sagan said the feedback was appreciated and every page was read, even the comments that said, “probably nobody will read these comments.” Chair Sagan extended his thanks to Acting Commissioner Wulfson and his team, and special thanks to Deb Steenland, Rhoda Schneider, Helene Bettencourt, and Courtney Sullivan. Chair Sagan thanked Ms. Morris of Korn Ferry and commended her work as the search consultant.

Chair Sagan said the Board’s responsibility is to recommend a candidate to Secretary Peyser. By statute, eight of 11 members must agree on the recommendation, and assuming the Secretary accepts the nomination, then the Secretary makes the appointment. Chair Sagan said the Board has a moral and legal commitment to close the ongoing achievement gap, and that commitment guides our decision. He added that ultimately the families and students of Massachusetts who will be served by the next commissioner will judge whether the Board chose the right candidate.

Chair Sagan informed members that they would each have a chance to speak, for as much time as they want. He added there would be a roll-call vote and deliberations would continue until one candidate receives eight votes. Chair Sagan noted that the meeting would, as is customary, follow Robert's Rules of Order as well as the Open Meeting Law.

Chair Sagan reviewed the position specifications that the Board decided on as a group, including: Be an agent for change, with a vision and strategy to achieve educational equity; Advocate for students' learning, well-being, and social-emotional health; Communicate skillfully through multiple modes of influence and messaging; Inspire the system through leadership and setting the right tone at the top; Demonstrate empathy and understanding of how to navigate and build relationships across diverse communities and demonstrate how to put students and families first at all times; Listen thoughtfully; Be the champion for our educators; Effectively manage the work of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department); and Lead with integrity and humility.

Chair Sagan said he believes the three finalists embody all of the specifications and said he was inspired by all three. He encouraged members to discuss the positives, respecting that all the finalists are dedicated educators and fine professionals who have put themselves forward. Chair Sagan explained that members would speak in alphabetical order, except that the Chair and the Secretary would speak last.

Ms. Craven began by describing the three candidates as magical, each with an impressive story. She said she believes it is most important for the commissioner to have district management experience that informs policy judgment, particularly around closing achievement gaps. Ms. Craven said Jeff Riley embodies those characteristics and has closed achievement gaps; he turned around the Edwards School in Boston and has brought about impressive results in Lawrence, although more remains to be done. Ms. Craven said Mr. Riley has shown he can work with bureaucracy, work with principals, and get things done without drama. She said he brings talent, compassion, and a track record of results to the position, and his familiarity with Massachusetts education policy and history would be a big plus. Ms. Craven said she had some informal conversations with business leaders who agreed with her support for Mr. Riley. Ms. Craven said that while all three finalists showed their passion and accomplishments, she will be voting for Mr. Riley.

Mr. Doherty said he was impressed with two candidates in particular and could vote for either, and he would echo a lot of what Ms. Craven said. Mr. Doherty explained that he sat across the bargaining table from Mr. Riley for the first contract negotiated under the Lawrence Public Schools receivership, and while it was occasionally a rocky road for both the union and the receiver, most people would acknowledge that Jeff Riley has done a lot of very good work in Lawrence. Mr. Doherty cited the improvement in test scores, reduction in the dropout rate, and increase in the graduation rate. He said Mr. Riley's leadership at the Edwards School in Boston was similarly very positive. Mr. Doherty said he is pleased that Mr. Riley did not simply double down on math and English and test preparation but rather made sure the students have art, music, physical education, and other enrichment activities. Mr. Doherty commended Mr. Riley's outreach to the community and parents and said he is pleased Mr. Riley acknowledges the impact of poverty on students' lives. Mr. Doherty said he supports Mr. Riley for commissioner.

Ms. Fernandez expressed her gratitude to the preliminary screening committee for their work and to the three finalists. She said it was heartwarming to hear from each candidate about their passion and the reasons they are in this work. She noted Ms. Schwinn's extensive experience with performance management. Ms. Fernandez said she is impressed with Mr. Riley's track record of making steady improvements in challenging educational environments; he has demonstrated his commitment to investing in teachers and staff members from the community, and knows Boston and gateway communities.

Ms. Fernandez said much work remains to be done to close gaps in the Commonwealth that disproportionately affect children of color, and the next commissioner must set a bold vision and be someone who can build bridges, inspire hope, and build trust in the families and communities we serve. Ms. Fernandez said while each candidate spoke in their own way about doing these things, she believes Angélica Infante-Green is the right person: she is highly qualified for the job, has systems experience, and has deep expertise in educating low-income students, English learners, and differently-abled children. Ms. Fernandez concluded that on a personal note, she saw that her 10-year-old daughter, who wants to be a teacher, was moved and inspired when she watched the video of Ms. Infante-Green's interview. Ms. Fernandez said it is time for Massachusetts to have the first Latina and woman selected for this position and she believes the candidate best qualified for the role is Angélica Infante-Green.

Ms. McKenna said she agrees that Angélica Infante-Green is the right person at the right time, noting that Massachusetts needs someone with real expertise to address the Commonwealth's very serious gap in Latino student achievement. Ms. McKenna added this has been Ms. Infante-Green's life's work: she is an expert in bilingual education; she is an inspiring, excellent communicator; and she has run large education departments. Ms. McKenna said Ms. Infante-Green has all the qualities we are seeking and we should not pass up this opportunity.

Ms. McKenna said while she knows Mr. Riley and admires his accomplishments, each of the candidates will have a learning curve and being from out of state should not be penalized. She said someone from outside of Massachusetts could bring a new perspective. Ms. McKenna said she believes at this point Ms. Infante-Green is best qualified for the job. Ms. McKenna said she has heard from people in the business and labor community about their support for Ms. Infante-Green, with some expressing concern that the leadership of Massachusetts education is all male. Ms. McKenna said this is a great opportunity to appoint a highly qualified candidate who is a woman, and she supports Ms. Infante-Green for the job.

Mr. Moriarty said if he had to vote on Friday he would have voted for Ms. Infante-Green, because he thought her interview was vastly superior to the other two. He commented that he wished each candidate had addressed early literacy more thoroughly. Mr. Moriarty said he went back and looked at results, and that has left him today prepared to vote for Mr. Riley. He said while it is hard to bypass the opportunity to bring in an accomplished Latina educator, he has seen Mr. Riley improve outcomes for English learners in Lawrence more than New York State has, and in addition Mr. Riley has diversified the staff in Lawrence. Mr. Moriarty said Mr. Riley's knowledge of Massachusetts is important. He said Mr. Riley has integrity and strength of conviction, as demonstrated through his accomplishments. Mr. Moriarty added that Mr. Riley is humble and forthright about his learning curve. Mr. Moriarty said one important legacy that

Commissioner Chester left was the knowledgeable, skillful, deep bench of people in the Department; many of these people are here because of Commissioner Chester, including Mr. Riley. Mr. Moriarty said his vote is for Mr. Riley.

Vice-Chair Morton said when he scored the candidates initially, they were very close, and today they are still very close. He explained that he identified the factors that were most important to him and most critical for the next educational leader in the Commonwealth: experience in turnarounds and closing achievement gaps; teacher evaluation coupled with professional development; assessment; the effect of poverty and how we counteract it; partnerships to promote inclusion; work with the community and non-profit organizations; parent engagement; and experience with budgets and management. Vice-Chair Morton said he had wanted to choose Ms. Schwinn, who spoke articulately and passionately about her own personal experience and who she has become, as did Ms. Infante-Green. In the end, however, Vice-Chair Morton said there was a single point difference between the candidates, and the candidate who had the most points in the categories that mattered most to him is Mr. Riley. Vice-Chair Morton added Mr. Riley has demonstrated his capabilities and his enormous growth potential, and with the support of this Board and many others he will advance student success, which is our ultimate objective. Vice-Chair Morton said Mr. Riley is the commissioner we need.

Ms. Stewart said the interviews were invaluable to her and she came away seeing the strengths and passion of each candidate and also how different they each are. She said as the parent representative she was looking for what the candidates would do to promote family engagement and community partnerships, and was struck by how they were all parents and their children had a deep impact on how they approached their work. Ms. Stewart said while she recognizes the value that Mr. Riley has had in Lawrence, she was most impressed with Ms. Infante-Green, who was deeply engaged in implementing bilingual education and related programs in New York City and then at the New York State education agency. Ms. Stewart noted the impact that Ms. Infante-Green made in her interview on Friday, including her asset-based approach in referring to differently-abled people. Ms. Stewart said she believes Ms. Infante-Green will drive innovation and inspire the Department, and she supports Ms. Infante-Green as the next commissioner.

Ms. Trimarchi said she was truly humbled and honored to be a part of this process as the student representative. She said the achievement gap is key for her, and Jeff Riley has a nuanced understanding of how to address it. Ms. Trimarchi noted Mr. Riley's work in Lawrence to double the number of Latino teachers and triple the number of teachers from the community in the school system. She added that Mr. Riley was the only candidate who really addressed her question on student engagement and spoke to the idea of empowering students, parents, and stakeholders as a key to closing the achievement gap. Ms. Trimarchi added that she appreciated Mr. Riley's humility as well as his leadership and vision; he recognizes his learning curve and is willing to tap into the resources we already have in place. She said she will vote for Mr. Riley.

Mr. West thanked Chair Sagan and the preliminary screening committee for a great process and thanked the public for the overwhelming amount of input received, which he said shows the depth of commitment to education in the Commonwealth and is very encouraging. Mr. West said we have three proven leaders, all of whom would do great things for students in the Commonwealth, and the question is which one is the best fit for Massachusetts at this point. He

said Ms. Schwinn came across as a compassionate, capable leader and he liked her approach to performance management. He said Ms. Infante-Green has a strong track record at the district and state level, deep personal and professional experience with English learners and students with different abilities, and she established great rapport with the Board in her interview.

Mr. West explained that like Mr. Moriarty, he looked at all the evidence, and with the challenges we are facing right now, Mr. Riley is the candidate best equipped to address our unfinished business in education. Mr. West said Mr. Riley has the track record; we have seen his skillful leadership in Lawrence, his ability to build consensus, and his commitment to all learners. He added that Mr. Riley was able to articulate more than the other candidates a coherent vision for the state education agency and relate it to outcomes and how to achieve them. Mr. West said Mr. Riley has deep classroom experience, which helped shape how he thinks about school and district turnaround. He noted that Mr. Riley also has support from Massachusetts superintendents despite his unique role as receiver. Mr. West said tackling the achievement gap is the key challenge before us; Mr. Riley has direct experience with this challenge and has delivered impressive results. Mr. West concluded that Mr. Riley is the strongest candidate for the position.

Chair Sagan said the search process was very heartening; all three finalists are passionate about the work and have accomplished a lot. He said our priority is closing the gap and ensuring equity, and all three candidates share that aspiration. He noted Ms. Infante-Green has done that in New York City and New York State, and the feedback was consistently positive. He said similarly Ms. Schwinn has devoted herself to this work at many different levels and achieved success. Chair Sagan said they have both demonstrated a deep commitment to education and he believes they will continue to do great work wherever they are.

Chair Sagan said Mr. Riley has done most of his work in the Commonwealth and he too has demonstrated follow-through, commitment, and success. The Chair noted that Lawrence, Massachusetts is the school district the entire country looks to as a successful district turnaround, and the person who has led that work is Jeff Riley. Chair Sagan added that Mr. Riley learned a lot by working for the best state education leader in the nation, Mitchell Chester.

Chair Sagan said Mr. Riley has shown he can break logjams and get the important things done; he has demonstrated that he is a pragmatist but will not compromise on fundamental principles. In Lawrence, the Chair noted, Mr. Riley expanded the school day to give students more time on academics as well as arts and enrichment, and he brought about great gains for students despite budgetary and other constraints. Chair Sagan concluded by stating that of the three candidates, Jeff Riley is the one who can hit the ground running and has the best chance of accomplishing the Board's ambitious goals because he understands how to get this work done in Massachusetts.

Secretary Peyser thanked and commended Chair Sagan for leading the Board through a very deliberate yet efficient search process. He said he has been honored to participate and is moved by the intelligence, integrity, and wisdom of the members of the Board, which deepens his confidence in citizen government. Secretary Peyser said of the three outstanding candidates, he believes Mr. Riley is the best choice for us at this time. He said Mr. Riley has shown he is able to mobilize collective resources to make a difference. The Secretary added that Mr. Riley understands execution – how to turn good policy into better outcomes for students – and has

demonstrated his ability to build bridges and establish relationships across traditional boundaries. Secretary Peyser commented that Mr. Riley is one of those unusual people who can anger and please people at the same time, and even when people may not be able to communicate with each other, he can talk to them honestly, push their thinking to a higher level, and reach an understanding of what needs to be done.

Secretary Peyser said what Mr. Riley has achieved in Lawrence is remarkable, and he did so in a way that reflects humility, respect, and a commitment to change. The Secretary said Mr. Riley is an innovative thinker who very much created the playbook in Lawrence based on his experience in Boston and elsewhere. Secretary Peyser highlighted Mr. Riley's open architecture design, creating a system of schools rather than a school system, which has been a tremendous contribution to education reform not just here but nationally. He also highlighted the acceleration academies, a unique approach that has produced tremendous results for students. The Secretary said it is a rare skill to be able to think creatively and then put that thinking into action. Secretary Peyser concluded by stating the search process has been completely open; the fact that this national search has resulted in a Massachusetts candidate emerging as the strongest simply reflects the fact that Mr. Riley is the right person to lead the work that needs to be done right now. Secretary Peyser said he enthusiastically supports Mr. Riley's nomination for commissioner.

Ms. Craven clarified to members that while she had conversations with some members of the business community, she wanted to reiterate that she was not officially speaking on their behalf.

Chair Sagan asked for a motion for a roll-call vote, and the motion was seconded and voted unanimously. Helene Bettencourt, Chief of Staff, took the roll-call vote in alphabetical order, with the Chair voting last.

Katherine Craven voted for Jeff Riley
Ed Doherty voted for Jeff Riley
Amanda Fernandez voted for Angélica Infante-Green
Margaret McKenna voted for Angélica Infante-Green
Michael Moriarty voted for Jeff Riley
James Morton voted for Jeff Riley
James Peyser voted for Jeff Riley
Mary Ann Stewart voted for Angélica Infante-Green
Hannah Trimarchi voted for Jeff Riley
Martin West voted for Jeff Riley
Paul Sagan voted for Jeff Riley

Chair Sagan announced **eight votes for Jeff Riley** and three votes for Angélica Infante-Green and said that carries the day. Chair Sagan said he would entertain a motion if someone wanted to make it a unanimous recommendation.

Chair Sagan called for a 10-minute recess. The Board returned at 2:17 p.m.

Chair Sagan stated that one candidate, Mr. Riley, received the required number of votes and the Board would now vote to authorize the Chair to submit this candidate to the Secretary for approval; assuming the Secretary approves, the same motion would authorize the Chair to negotiate terms and work out a start date.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education authorizes the Chair to submit Jeff Riley to the Secretary of Education for approval and appointment as Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, and authorizes the Chair or his designee to negotiate with Jeff Riley over the specific terms and conditions of his appointment as Commissioner.

The vote was 10-0-1, with Secretary Peyser abstaining.

Chair Sagan echoed what the Secretary had said, stating it has been a privilege to work together as a Board on this; even though filling Mitchell Chester's job was probably the one thing we did not want to tackle, unfortunately we were called upon to do it. Chair Sagan said we have done this work with honor and integrity in Mitchell Chester's memory, and he would want us to carry the work forward. Chair Sagan thanked the members and said he will keep them informed.

Ms. McKenna thanked the Chair for all the time and attention he devoted to the search process, as well as his unflagging humor and patience. She thanked Ms. Bettencourt for her support throughout the process. Chair Sagan said he appreciated the time and effort that everyone put into this. Ms. Craven said she appreciated that we had three such great candidates to consider.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 2:20 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,
Rhoda E. Schneider, General Counsel
(on behalf of Jeff Wulfson
Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
and Secretary to the Board)